

Message Text

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17

ORIGIN ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /059 R

DRAFTED BY ARA/ECA:FERONDON:JC

APPROVED BY ARA:CWBRAV

ARA:GLISTER

D/HA:MSPEAR (DRAFT)

----- 056952

R 110105Z NOV 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 277256

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, PINT, PINS, SHUM,AR

SUBJECT: GRAND RABBI REVIEWS ARGENTINE POLITICAL SITUATION

1. GRAND RABBI OF BUENOS AIRES, FITTERMAN, CALLED ON DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS BRAY ON NOVEMBER 10. RABBI WAS ACCOMPANIED BY DAVID GELLER OF AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE. GEORGE LISTER OF ARA, MONCRIEFF SPEAR OF D/HA AND FERNANDO RONDON OF ARA/ECA WERE ALSO PRESENT. FITTERMAN WAS ANXIOUS THAT HIS REMARKS BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. AFTER DISCUSSING THE GROWTH OF THE MONTONEROS, THE RABBI COMMENTED ON PRESIDENT VIDELA'S POWER EXPRESSING SERIOUS CONCERN THAT AN EXTREMIST RIGHT-WING GOVERNMENT WOULD ASSUME CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT IF VIDELA FAILED. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE URGED U.S. SUPPORT FOR VIDELA.

2. FITTERMAN CLAIMED THE MONTONEROS ARE GROWING IN NUMBERS BECAUSE DISSATISFIED WORKERS ARE JOINING THEIR RANKS. HE
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NOTED THAT BUS FARE HAD GONE UP FOUR TIMES, THAT MEAT HAD

RISEN SIX TIMES AND THAT WORKERS WERE BEGINNING TO GO HUNGRY. HE COMMENTED THAT ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ WAS TRYING TO EXPORT EVERYTHING ABROAD THAT COULD BE SOLD SUCH AS LEATHER AND MEAT; RABBI SAID A PORTION OF THESE THINGS SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ADMIT IT, HE ADDED, BUT

HARD-PRESSED WORKERS ARE TURNING TO MONTONEROS.

3. RABBI WAS CONCERNED THAT PRESIDENT VIDELA WILL NOT LAST IN POWER. HE SAID VIDELA IS AN HONEST, CLEAN, PURITANICAL (SIC) INDIVIDUAL, WHO RESISTED BEING NAMED PRESIDENT. FITTERMAN SAID VIDELA IS WEAK, HOWEVER, AND THE ULTRA-RIGHT WING WOULD INHERIT POWER, I.E., GENERALS MENENDEZ (MENTIONED SEVERAL TIMES), BUSSI, CAPELLINI, AND AGOSTI. FOREIGN MINISTER GUZZETTI WAS ALSO PUT IN THIS CAMP. RABBI WARNED THAT POSSIBILITY ALSO EXISTED THAT SOME LEFTIST GENERAL WITH MONTONERO SUPPORT COULD ALSO TAKE POWER.

4. POSSIBILITY OF AN EXTREME RIGHTIST GENERAL PARTICULARLY HAUNTED FITTERMAN. HE DESCRIBED ARMY THIRST FOR VENGEANCE AND FELT THAT THOUSANDS, ESPECIALLY THE JEWS, WOULD BE MURDERED IF RIGHTISTS TOOK OVER. HE NOTED THAT ARMY IS SUFFERING DAILY LOSSES AND WANTS TO RETALIATE. SUCH RETALIATION WOULD BE UNLEASHED BY A RIGHTIST SUCCESSOR. HE USED THE WORD BLOOD BATH.

5. FITTERMAN URGED U.S. PRESSURE ON VIDELA SO THAT AAA RIGHTIST SQUADS COULD BE ELIMINATED. HE ATTRIBUTED WORSE RIGHT-WING, ANTI-SEMITIC VIOLENCE TO THIS ORGANIZATION. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO CONGRESSIONAL SANCTIONS AGAINST ARGENTINA OR ANY PUBLIC CRITICISM OF VIDELA. IN OTHER WORDS, HE WANTED TO SEE PRESSURE APPLIED BUT IN NO WAY WHICH COULD THREATEN VIDELA.

6. FITTERMAN
WAS ALSO SCHEDULED TO MEET WITH CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS.
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7. HE IS NOT PLANNING TO RETURN TO ARGENTINA FOR NOW. HE FEARS LEFT-WING COULD KIDNAP HIM AND FORCE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO RANSOM HIM. FITTERMAN IS A NATURALIZED AMERICAN CITIZEN.

8. AFTER CONVERSATION, FITTERMAN REITERATED HIS CONCERN THAT HIS CALL ON DEPARTMENT BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

DEPARTMENT ASSURED RABBI THAT CALL AND SUBJECTS DISCUSSED
WOULD BE KEPT STRICTLY REPEAT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, POLITICAL LEADERS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE277256
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: FERONDON:JC
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760420-0574
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761156/aaaabwgb.tel
Line Count: 118
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 JUL 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <22 OCT 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GRAND RABBI REVIEWS ARGENTINE POLITICAL SITUATION
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, SHUM, AR, (FITTERMAN), (BRAY)
To: BUENOS AIRES
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006